



**Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission
Turners Falls, Massachusetts
Meeting Minutes
November 13, 2015**

Agenda Items:

1. Determination of Quorum, Approval of Today's Agenda & Minutes of the June 15, 2015 Meeting (Hyatt)

Chair Mr. Bill Hyatt called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. A quorum was present, given NH Public Representative Duncan McInnes' term had recently expired. Mr. Glenn Normandeau stated they are working on having Mr. McInnes reappointed by the Governor. Mr. Andy Fisk and Mr. Peter Basta were not present and Mr. Dan Morris participated by phone. Chair Hyatt asked everyone to state their name and affiliations followed by the general audience.

The minutes of the last CRASC meeting on June 15, 2015 were reviewed, an edit was noted on page two and corrective wording was provided. A motion to accept the minutes from that meeting was made, seconded, all were in favor.

2. Report of the Coordinator and TECH Shad / River Herring subcommittees (Sprankle)

Mr. Sprankle provided a handout for the Commissioners and attendees and reviewed topic items which are summarized here. The basin fish facility counts were reviewed, which reflected the complete upstream passage season as opposed to the June meetings update figures. American shad passage counts were noted as being very strong relative to available time-series, with a highlight being a new shad passage record at Vernon Dam/Fishway where 39,771 adults were passed, exceed the 1992 previous record year total of 37,197. Time series passage figures were reviewed and a table with data for main stem fishways for American shad was discussed. It was noted in that table that passage of shad at Turners Falls fishways (passing out of Gatehouse Ladder), was a time series - proportional high, relative to Holyoke Fish Lift counts, at 14.1%. Ken noted that is a time series high but still remains far below management plan objectives for shad (proportion) passage at successive upstream dam (40-60% is objective). This passage objective was attained at Vernon with 68.5% of the shad counted passing Turner's Falls Gatehouse Ladder, subsequently counted passing Vernon Dam. Other figures on shad daily passage at Holyoke in relation to river discharge and American eel counts at Holyoke eel passes/traps in relation to discharge through the end of October were reviewed. A table showing all fish captured and moved from Holyoke Fish Lift was discussed. Ken noted that the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission had a planned river herring monitoring program meeting coming up and that he, Steve Gephard and Ben Gahagen of the Tech would be attending. Ken presented some preliminary summary relative abundance and sample summary data for blueback herring in 2015 in relation to 2014 and 2013 with a set of figures.

Figures showing the time series from CTDEEP Juvenile Alosid Seine Survey for both American shad and blueback herring were discussed. The 2015 geometric mean value for shad relatively high (>75th percentile) since 1978 and for blueback was fairly good relatively to data since the early 1990s.

Chair Hyatt asked about other juvenile index efforts in other states of the basin. They were noted as sporadic, with the exception of Vermont Yankee monitoring which developed a good program in 2000 but is being contested for ongoing requirement due to the plant's closure at the end of 2014. Ken noted there was interest in considering development of a standardized method that could occur from Bellows Falls to estuary on the main stem – perhaps to in theory, better examine juvenile production among river segments, with adult escapement values known, and also examined relative to impounded and unimpounded habitats. The VY monitoring work was all conducted wholly in the impounded area upstream of Vernon Dam. This idea will be discussed by biologists this winter.

It was noted that the CRASC Shad Plan Team had initiated efforts to update the management plan. Ken reviewed three areas of active shad research involving the Connecticut River including, the NOAA Shad Population Model (biologists meeting recently on this), the NOAA Shad fecundity study and the USGS Conte Energetics/Spawning/ Temperature Study.

A motion to accept the Coordinator's Report was made, seconded and all were in favor.

3. Report of the Technical Committee (Slater)

Dr. Slater provided a handout on the CRASC Technical Committee's meeting on June 10, 2014 and the various subcommittees activities with the exception of shad and river herring covered earlier. That hand out is included in its entirety here:

Fish Passage Subcommittee; John Warner (USFWS)

Holyoke

HG&E's new rack and downstream bypass system are nearing completion.

- New full depth racks have been installed.
- New midlevel and bottom downstream bypass system installed.
- New bascule gate has been installed.
- New downstream flow containing wall and "flip lip" installed.
- Plunge pool has been constructed and lined with concrete.
- Spillway fishlift entrance narrowed and bumpout removed.
- Upstream fishway exit flume extension to be installed this month.
- Rack rake still to be installed.
- Water up and test in December- Ready for fish in April.

There was some discussion on the evaluation studies that will be conducted in 2016 which will include shortnose sturgeon. The CCT (settlement group) has draft plans for shad and eels but not sturgeon, there was discussion on timing of permits to handle sturgeon and who will be doing that – it was not resolved. Mr. Dan Morris (NOAA) noted he would be available to assist on the matter of required permit for SNS work if needed.

Connecticut River Relicensings

- Most of the aquatic studies for the 5 projects undergoing relicensing by TransCanada and FirstLight Power have been completed or are about to wrap up.
- Operations of the projects, due to the drought and warm conditions early, followed by higher flows and cooler temps created havoc with the proposed study schedule for shad releases, spawning studies, etc, but we still anticipate getting good data.
- Hatchery YOY shad which were to be used for tagging studies did not meet expectations, and were replaced with wild caught fish.
- A pump/turbine outage at NMPS this summer did not allow full pumping tests to be performed- we will review three pump results and may request four pump tests next summer.
- We have received some preliminary study reports, but the majority of reports will be available this winter and into next spring.

Fisk Mill Dam, Ashuelot River

Fishlift completed and running, but effectiveness is not known.

Salmon Subcommittee; Steve Gephard (CTDEEP)

Spring Stocking Summary

- All salmon fry were stocked by CTDEEP in Connecticut
- Total of 390,667 fry: 268,961 Farmington River; 121,706 Salmon River

Adult Returns

- Demographic information (from scales) on the 22 adult returns is available

Summer Electrofishing

- CT: 1+ below average densities, 0+ typical densities
- VT and MA reported significant numbers of 2+ parr in some streams

Conte Lab Swim Flume Study

7 salmon transported from Holyoke lift to Conte Lab, 4 salmon “swam” flume and returned to river, 3 documented passing upstream through Turners Falls.

Chair Hyatt added that CTDEEP had stocked out over 1,600 adult broodstock to provide fishery opportunities outside of the Connecticut River basin and that this program had additional benefits for school programs and CTDEEP goal of maintaining this species in targeted tributary habitats.

Sea Lamprey Subcommittee; Melissa Grader (USFWS)

- Subcommittee did not meet this summer- but the Sea Lamprey management plan is nearly complete and will go out to subcommittee members for review this month.
- Conte lab has received a grant from the Great lakes Fishery Council to study salinity tolerance and growth of sea lamprey and great lakes lamprey transformers.

Sturgeon Subcommittee; Alex Haro (USGS), Steve Gephard (CTDEEP)

- Continue to tag fish at Agawam winter site. Fish from Agawam tracked to Holyoke, should be possible to use these fish to look at attraction to new spillway fish lift entrance.

- Swim speed tests in flume to continue.
- Gulf of ME work with SNS and Atlantics to continue. Atlantic Sturgeon; question of possible restoration from the Commission
- New Atlantic Sturgeon data from CTDEEP
 - Captured 50 small (<50mm) individuals in 2013
 - Unlikely to have migrated to CT River
 - Samples taken for genetic analysis- preliminary results do not match with Hudson River
 - CTDEEP did receive a grant to continue study SNS and Atlantics in CTR
 - Recent samples include 1+ and 2+ Atlantics, this suggests there was successful spawning in 2013 and 2014

Chair Hyatt noted that the CTDEEP has initiated a two-year study designed to sample for juvenile Atlantic and shortnose sturgeon in State waters of the main stem to identify presence and habitat associations as well as obtain more tissue samples and better understand this poorly examined life stage.

American eel Subcommittee; Tim Wildman (CTDEEP)

- Over 1,000 eel imported from Canada for use in CTR FERC studies. Fish health screening on 120 eel was clean and no swim bladder nematodes.
- CTR eels (67) clean for bacteria and virus and 20% had swim bladder nematodes.
- CTDEEP: update on silver eel migration at 3 sites - migration cued by rain events.
- Manhan River in MA- camera is running.
- Conte Lab: Flume tests underway to compare downstream passage via airlift vs. siphon bypass.

Mr. Eric Palmer asked about the federal ESA status review on eel. Mr. Bill Archambault noted that several weeks prior, USFWS had made a - not warranted determination.

Habitat Subcommittee; Steve Gephard (CTDEEP)

- Reviewed and showed photos of one dam removal, one dam modification, three culvert fishways, and one culvert inventory project that are taking place this summer/fall in Connecticut

4. CRASC Management Plans for species (*Sprankle*)

Mr. Sprankle noted that the upcoming relicensing of the five main stem hydroelectric projects will include new fish passage, habitat and likely operational recommendations. All of these recommendations by state, federal and other entities will benefit from having current fishery plans in place. These plans can be submitted to FERC for status as a comprehensive plan, which requires the process to account for how actions will impact fishery plan goals and objectives. The Shad Plan is expected to be completed for this process, it would be beneficial to have plans for other migratory species as well, but staff resources are limiting. There was discussion on the use of these fishery plans also for federal 401 water quality certifications.

There was discussion on the development of Status reports, like the recently completed American Shad report. Chair Hyatt noted that these reports were intended to be brief and get the groups started towards development of management plans. He noted those status reports should be brief and concise and not have

staff think they are in for a large time commitment.

5. CRASC Tech Work Plans (Slater)

Dr. Slater noted that there is the CRASC Shad Plan meeting work in December, and subcommittee meetings for American shad and River Herring in early winter, and the Sea Lamprey Management Plan team will also be meeting.

6. CRASC Officer Status (Hyatt)

Chair Hyatt noted that with Director Wayne MacCallum's retirement last winter, the CRASC Vice Chair position needed to be reconsidered. Bill noted that he had talked with Mr. Andy Fisk and that Andy was interested in serving the Commission in any capacity that would benefit its work. Jack Buckley then made a motion to nominate Andy Fisk for Vice Chair. The motion was seconded by Glenn Normandeau, and a vote was taken. It was unanimously determined by vote that Mr. Andy Fisk would assume the role of CRASC Vice Chair effective immediately.

7. Other Business

Mr. Bob Nasdor (audience) addressed the CRASC to inform them of pending U.S. House of Representatives Energy Committee language that would seek to reduce the state and federal natural agencies role in Federal Energy permits. He stated that HR-8 seeks to weaken the 401 (Clean Water Act) permit process. Mr. Hyatt noted he had heard of this committee bill on the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies conference call of the Directors. Bill noted he would bring it up on the next AFWA call as they had recently replied on a proposed bill that also was to strip conservation measures and considerations at the FERC level.

Mr. Sprankle noted that the CRASC checking account, approximately \$1,900.00 in it at the Bank of America, started to be billed a monthly fee of \$25.00 in September of this year as "new fee" due to the balance of that account. Mr. Sprankle noted he had, in consultation with Chair Hyatt, closed that account and was planning on setting up a new checking account after this meeting. There was agreement and no discussion on the matter.

Meeting adjourned at 11:40AM

Prepared by:

Ken Sprankle
CRASC Executive Assistant and
Secretary/Treasurer

Date

Attendees
Bill Hyatt

Jack Buckley
Eric Palmer
Bob Jones
Glenn Normandeau
Bill Archambault
Dan Morris (phone)
Ken Sprankle
Steve Gephard
Caleb Slater
Bob Nasdor
Bob Stira
Lael Will
Jim Carroll